

11. FURTHER ADDITIONS TO THE BIRDS OF KUTCH

The Bombay Natural History Society's Bird Migration Study project conducted by Dr. Sálím Ali in the spring this year has added one more species to the existing list of the birds of Kutch, and two more specimens of a rare migrant to the bird collections of the Society. This rare migrant is

***Hypocolius ampelinus* Bonaparte**

♀ collected on 22 March 1960

♂ collected on 23 March 1960

both at Kuar Bet, c. three miles from camp.

The diminishing daily catches prompted Dr. Sálím Ali to issue instructions to the field party on the night of the 20th to put up the nets farther afield than was being done till then. One such operational wing was put in charge of Dr. R. M. Naik of the Faculty of Science, Baroda, (one of the participants in the field team) and myself, and was located about 3 miles from the headquarters.

A beginning was made at this location on the 21st, but the day ended with the commoner birds being caught. On the 22nd at about 3.45 p.m. I found a bird, which I had neither seen earlier in the field nor at the time could recall having seen a specimen of in the Society's collections, entangled in one of the nets. It was carefully taken out and brought to camp where Dr. Sálím Ali revealed its identity to us as the female of *Hypocolius ampelinus*. The skin of this rare migrant was prepared for the Society's collection. While doing so its crop was examined and found to contain about 20 berries of *Salvadora persica*.

Enthused by the previous day's catch of a rare migrant we fixed the nets at the same spot on the 23rd. At about 3.30 p.m. another unrecognizable bird was seen by me perching on a *Salvadora* bush-top about 10 feet from one of the nets. It was busily feeding on its berries. Dr. R. M. Naik and myself now took upon ourselves the seemingly risky job of driving it into the nets, and getting it entangled. Rounding the bush it had perched on we placed the bird between ourselves on one side and the nets on the other. Scared by our presence it flew in the direction opposite to us and got entangled in one of the nets. When back at the headquarters with this specimen Dr. Sálím Ali told us that it was the male of *Hypocolius ampelinus*. Our difficulty in placing this second bird either in the field or when in hand was due to the fact that the female (a specimen of which we had seen the previous day) differs from the male in the absence of the black stripe from the lores, through the eye which widens to a broad band on the nape.

Solitary vagrants of this migrant are recorded from West Pakistan, Makran Coast, Khalat, Sind, Madhya Pradesh, and Bombay. In the Society's collections there are in all 15 specimens (10 ♂♂ and 5 ♀♀) of which only one has been taken in India. This is the one collected by Dr. Sálím Ali at Kihim, Kolaba District, Bombay on November 14, 1930, and reported in Vol. 34: 1061 of the *Journal*. The rest come from the Middle East. The above two skins, now preserved in the bird collections of the Society, bring the total of specimens of this rare migrant collected on Indian soil to three.

BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,

91, WALKESHWAR ROAD,

BOMBAY 6,

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[Another species added by the migration study field work to the Kutch list is the Whitefronted Finch-Lark, *Eremopterix nigriceps affinis* (Blyth). Two examples of this were taken in the nets, a third collected and preserved, and several others observed. On Kuar Bet this lark seemed to replace the commoner blackbellied species (e.g. *grisea*) of the less desert portions of Kutch.—EDS.]

12 CAN SNAKES PRODUCE VOCAL SOUNDS?

In the *Journal* (55: 578) I referred to vocal noises made by the Dhaman (*Ptyas mucosus*). Yesterday morning while shooting grey quail not far from Bombay we put up a large Dhaman in a dry paddy field.

As it rapidly glided away I had to tread on its tail and touch it with my gun barrels several times before it stopped and turned to attack. Till then we were mostly on and along a 3-foot high bund which perhaps prevented the snake from raising itself high enough to strike. When at bay several inches of neck and body behind the head were noticeably dilated and the snake uttered a very audible *aonh* which at a few feet sounded like a low growl. Others in the party who were 12 to 15 yards away also heard the noise, but Mr. Krishna Talcherkar told me afterwards that it sounded mournful to him.

The snake was captured without any physical injury having been inflicted upon it and there can now be little doubt that this species when angry (?) can emit a noise.

Clifford H. Pope in THE REPTILE WORLD (1957): 138 writes: 'Many snakes produce an alarming effect as in the cobra by inflating as well